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1869 - 1994

The Concise History of

# Annunciation Parish

Kiln, Mississippi  
Diocese of Biloxi

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The concise history of  
Annunciation Parish,  
Kiln, Mississippi,  
Diocese of Biloxi,  
1869-1994

## FOREWORD

The following brief history of Annunciation Parish, Kiln, and surrounding areas has been an interesting project for me for the past few months. However, due to the constraints of time and a deadline for our anniversary celebrations, I found myself with many inadequately answered questions. No doubt more time and more research would uncover the answers but right now I do not have that luxury. Consequently, many of you may detect some inaccuracies in this booklet, either of an historical nature or some factual information. Please feel free to make your own corrections.

As my research progressed, I found myself getting information from further afield. You will note that in the early days of this parish, the priests here were given responsibility for most of present day Hancock County, excluding Bay St. Louis and Waveland. At that time (1860-70's) Hancock County was considerably larger geographically than it is today. As a result, even parts of Harrison County (DeLisle-Dedaux-Lizana) were also missions of this parish. To do justice to the history of these areas would require much more time.

One of my major questions that remains unanswered is the date of construction of our present church structure. 1886 emerges as the date of construction of a newer church but some other record also points to 1906 as the date of another church construction. So if this structure is not the one built in 1886, it seems that 1906 stands as its construction date. In either case, this parish still holds the record for being the second oldest parish in Hancock County and based on these dates-quite possibly also holds the record for being the single oldest Catholic church structure still in active service in the entire diocese of Biloxi (comprising the 17 most southern counties of the state). In either case, these are facts worth celebrating at this time.

Feel free to bring any inaccuracies to my attention, or make your own corrections based on your own history. This is simply intended as a little record of some of the parish's interesting history and may serve to encourage others to dig a little deeper into the past to unearth the vast amount of unrecorded history that still awaits discovery.

Whatever you do-enjoy it for what it is worth, and I hope you also enjoyed our parish's celebrations on June 12th. That date was chosen at the Bishop's request. It has no historical relevance to the establishment of the parish to my knowledge, except that it also happens to be the 17th anniversary of my own ordination.

Enjoy  
Fr. Henry

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## HISTORY

Long ago, what is now Hancock County Mississippi was part of the Choctaw nation, and was also inhabited by Indians of the Chicapoula and Muskoegean tribes. The explorer, Jean Batiste Le Moyne, was the first European to set foot on the land in August 1699, and named the Bay of St. Louis in honor of the King of France. In December of the same year, his brother, d'Iberville, established the first colony on the shores of the Bay when he placed a few families there, and a sergeant with fifteen men to guard the settlers. This area remained under the French flag until 1763 when the British gained control. The first recorded land grant was made to one Philip Saucier in 1781. In 1810, the United States assumed control, and a large tract of land between the Bay of Biloxi in the east and the Pearl River to the west, and south of the 31st parallel to the Gulf of Mexico was designated a county in late 1812. It was given its name in honor of John Hancock, president of the Continental Congress. Later on, areas were carved from this tract to form the present counties of Harrison, Stone, and Pearl River, thereby leaving the present day Hancock County.<sup>(1)</sup>

An early visitor to this area in the 1850s described the land south of the 31st parallel as "a dreary and thinly inhabited" pine forest.<sup>(2)</sup> The humble homes of the few settlers, most of whom were small farmers, were often as much as 15 miles apart. Generally, the forest was unbroken. There was little undergrowth, and there was almost no wild life - even birds were scarce. The meager economic activity of this area was chiefly connected with its vast long-leaf pine forests. There were numerous kilns that produced large quantities of tar, and a by-product, charcoal. A good deal of timber was exported to France for Naval purposes, however some was worked at sawmills on the coast, having been floated out of the forest during the rainy season, partly by natural waterways, as well as long, straight ditches. Large herds of scrub cattle grazed under the pine trees, and small patches of crops, especially rice, sweet potatoes, and sugar cane were raised for home consumption. Very little cotton was raised south of the 31st parallel. During the railway boom of this decade, no rail line penetrated Southeastern Mississippi.<sup>(3)</sup>

## PRIESTS

The early white settlers in these parts were mainly of French descent and to a lesser extent, Spanish. Most of these were Catholic, so they brought with them French priests to minister to their spiritual needs. The early Missionaries to this area were mostly Jesuits who resided either in Mobile or New Orleans, and in their travels to either city, would visit these areas seeking to maintain the faith and to make converts. However, their visits were too infrequent to have any major effect on the lives of the settlers. One of these early Jesuit missionaries was attacked and murdered by a band of Indians. These Missionaries referred to this area of Mississippi as the Three Rivers - a name that continued for quite a few years. Their earliest records pertaining to this area are to be found in the Cathedrals of New Orleans and Mobile.

In the year 1837 (July 28th), the first Catholic diocese was established at Natchez, it being a busy river city in those days. John Joseph Chanche, S.S., was appointed as the first bishop. John Chanche had refused the position of bishop at Baltimore, Boston, and New York, and under Pope Gregory XVI, accepted the appointment as Bishop of Natchez. A few years after that (1843), the parish of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary was established in Biloxi, to make it the oldest parish on the Coast. Some early records of this area are also maintained there. Ten years after the establishment of the diocese, Bishop Chanche established a new parish, Our Lady of the Gulf, in Bay St. Louis. He appointed Rev. Louis Stanislaus Mary Buteux as its first pastor.

In his diary, Fr. Buteux wrote, "Saturday, July 31, 1847-the feast of St. Ignatius: Bishop Chanche told me at Natchez that he confides to me Bay St. Louis, Pass Christian, Pearl River, Jourdan and Wolf River, as far as 20 to 25 miles to the North."<sup>(4)</sup> Fr. Buteux had been born in Paris on July 2, 1808, and was ordained in Paris in 1836. He volunteered for the missions in Indiana, but found the climate of the North too severe, and was forced to seek a mission in the South. Bishop Chanche welcomed him into his diocese and appointed him as the first Pastor of Bay St. Louis. At that time there was no church in the Bay area, and his flock was scattered and poor. He offered Mass in the courthouse or in the home of some private family until 1848 when a cornerstone for a brick Gothic-style church was laid. At that time it may have been the largest church in the state. Bishop Chanche blessed the completed structure on August 19, 1849.<sup>(5)</sup>

After the completion of the church, Fr. Buteux was determined to have a school, and in 1852, he opened a school for boys, placing the Christian Broth-

ers in charge. However, an epidemic of yellow fever in 1853 forced him to dismiss the boarders and close the school. Among the victims of the fever were many of the teaching staff (whose graves are well marked in a cemetery in Pass Christian). In 1854, he reopened the school and placed the Brothers of the Sacred Heart in charge. This school was called St. Stanislaus, in honor of his patron saint.

In August of 1854, Fr. Buteux sailed to France and while there obtained three sisters from the order of St. Joseph of Bourg to open a school for girls in his parish. The sisters arrived in January 1855 to begin the foundations of St. Joseph Academy (or the present-day Our Lady Academy.) That boarding school for girls continued until 1969 but was damaged by Hurricane Camille and closed as a boarding school after that. Our Lady Academy was opened as a High School for girls in 1971. Fr. Buteux went to France again a few years later to request additional sisters for his parish and mission. He was encountering some difficulties in his endeavors, so while travelling through Ars in France, he consulted the saintly Cure - John Vianney. His letter to the Rev. Mother petitioned for more sisters and he wisely had the Cure countersign his letters, and his request was granted. <sup>(6)</sup> St. Joseph's Academy was the first foundation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Bourg in the United States. Fr. Buteux, due to ill health, resigned as Pastor in 1859 and died in Boston in 1875. The bishop of that time, Bishop Elder, paid him tribute "After years of fruitful labor and others spent in patient suffering, still occupied with the service of the souls." <sup>(7)</sup> In the intervening years, 1853-1855, J.O. Van de Velde, S.J. served as Bishop of Natchez. Bishop William Henry Elder took over as bishop in 1857 until 1889, when he became bishop of Cincinnati until his death in 1904.

During these years since the establishment of a parish in Bay St. Louis, the priests would visit as best they could, either by boat or on horseback. These visits would have been difficult at best, and very time consuming. The records for this area are still kept at O.L.G. as the priests resided there from 1847-1869. Records indicated that a little church was built on the banks of the Jourdan River in these years and was simply called the Jourdan River Mission. The next pastor in Bay St. Louis was Fr. Henry (Pere) LeDuc, born in Nantes, France, on January 1, 1834, and ordained there in 1859 (January 30th). Little did he know that Bay St. Louis was to be his one and only assignment, and that for the next 38 years, he would spend himself, and be spent, in the service of that parish. <sup>(8)</sup> Under his guidance, the church prospered and the schools flourished. His signature is still to be found on many of the early church

records kept here at Annunciation, and indeed his entries cover many pages of the records at O.L.G.

The Civil War was going on during Fr. LeDuc's pastorate, and in the spring of 1864 a company of Federal soldiers from Fort Pike at Chef Menteur landed at Bay St. Louis and was met by a company of Confederates. In the ensuing conflict, some prisoners were taken by the Confederates and two weeks later, 200 federal troops from a gunboat came to rescue the captives. Apparently, after another skirmish in which a confederate Captain was shot, the Yankees were determined to burn the town. Fr. LeDuc, then a young priest, appeared on the street in the neighborhood of the church, holding up a cross. The Federal soldiers, who it seems for the most part were Irish Catholics, instantly ceased firing and took off their hats out of respect for the cross. Thanks to Fr. LeDuc, peace was restored to Bay St. Louis.<sup>(9)</sup> During these years, it seems he often ran the Union blockade with a small schooner to bring in badly needed food and supplies. The present day rectory in Bay St. Louis is built on Beach Blvd. and Union Street.

During his tenure as pastor, he had to rebuild the original church which had been condemned by architects. He also built mission churches at Bayou Cadet (St. Henry), Pearlington (St. Joseph), Bayou La Croix (Holy Cross), and a little mission church in the Cedar Point area of Bay St. Louis on Dunbar Avenue called St. Joseph which is still used to this day. His records show that by the year 1879, he was responsible for 13 missions in addition to O.L.G. It was in these years that Annunciation was formed. The little church on the banks of the Jourdan River proved to be too small for the needs of the community, so in 1869, a larger structure was built and given the name of the Church of the Annunciation - probably at the site of the present-day church structure. This area continued to grow in those years and Fr. LeDuc or his assistants visited the area every six weeks. But with the construction of the new church, one of the assistant priests from Bay St. Louis took up residence here, even though he is not referred to in the records as pastor. His name was Fr. DeMorangies, and for all practical purposes, he became the first pastor of the area, taking care of many of the missions around here. In one of his visits to this area, Fr. LeDuc reported to the Bishop that "Fr. De Morangies is well and doing his best ; he travels continually on the rivers....The dear Father has now a good horse." Fr. LeDuc decided to visit his native land in 1897 and, while boarding the ship, managed to hurt his leg. This injury hastened his death which occurred August 27, 1897. He was buried in France, far from his beloved parish.<sup>(10)</sup>

In the years following, there was quite a turnover of priests here at Annun-

ciation Church. Fr. Florent replaced Fr. DeMorangies as administrator in 1871, but had to resign his position after a few months due to ill health, whereupon the Pastor, Fr. LeDuc again resumed his periodic travels to this area, as it still was part of his mission territory. In the following years, the names of Fathers Meerschaert, Oberti, and Dutto were listed in church records as attending to the needs of this church in 1872-1881. These priests, for the most part, attended to the needs of this area from Bay St. Louis.

The attending priest of this area from 1881-1886 was a Fr. Van Waesberghe, and during his tenure as administrator of the area, Bayou Cadet, Bayou LaCroix, Pearllington, and Wolftown (Delisle) are all listed as missions serviced from here. Fr. Van Waesberghe was later appointed Pastor of Aberdeen, Mississippi, from 1890-1891. He was succeeded here by Fr. Ketels who served here until 1891 when he moved to Wolftown and established the parish in that area today known as Delisle. It seems that this area got its first Post Office about this time. It was not until the year 1891, when Fr. Henry Mortier was appointed to take charge of Annunciation and its missions, that he was referred to as "Pastor" of the parish. He, like his predecessors, was responsible for multiple missions throughout the Northern and Western parts of Hancock County. It must be remembered that the size of Hancock County changed quite a number of times over those years, and it was not until the early 1900's that it assumed its present proportions. Prior to that, it was the largest county in the state of Mississippi, covering the present day counties of Harrison, Pearl River, and even portions of Stone and Forrest counties. Fr. Mortier's signature appears many times in our Church records. Fr. Mortier was succeeded by Fr. Schmitt until 1899 when Fr. DeGruyder took over as pastor for the next three years. He had served as assistant at Tucker Mississippi prior to this assignment.

After him came a man called Fr. Henry Chauvin who remained as Pastor here for sixteen years. Recently, I spoke with an elderly man in Hancock Hospital <sup>(11)</sup> from Clermont Harbor who recalled being told how Fr. Chauvin used to visit that area of the parish - usually on foot, and travelling from house to house on his pastoral visitations. He recalled being told how Fr. Chauvin used to "roost" for the night at various homes of bachelor gentlemen wherever he was when it got dark, and he would continue his visitations the next day. He, too, took care of the missions at Pearllington, Logtown (which is now in the Buffer Zone), Bayou Cadet, Bayou LaCroix, Lakeshore, and Fenton. Even though he lived here from 1903, he may not have been appointed as Pastor until 1914.

Now that we have come up to more recent times, many of our present

congregation still have memories of the next pastor to serve this parish. He arrived at this parish and was appointed Pastor on August 18th, 1919, and his name was Fr. Alexander C. Denis. He was born in Liege, Belgium, studied for the priesthood at St. Stephen Seminary, New Orleans, and Kenrick Seminary, St. Louis. Ordained June 11, 1909, in St. Louis, he came to this diocese in October of that year. He served as assistant at St. Paul, Vicksburg, and St. Joseph, Woodville, and for some reason spent three years (1916-1919), interned in his native Belgium. He is remembered by many older parishioners today as a man who lived a very frugal lifestyle, who endured many lean years during the Depression here in Kiln. He travelled to the mission churches in his Model-T Ford, and apparently never gained a great command of the English language. Many people say that they had a difficult time understanding him. During his tenure, Sacred Heart in Dedeaux was added as a mission to this parish where he built a church. That parish recently celebrated its 25th anniversary as a Parish (1993). Even though he lived through difficult economic times, and collections from the missions and parish were meager, he managed to survive. In one of his reports to Bishop Gerow he asks the Bishop "to pray for the poorest people in your diocese" and added that he had nothing to complain about - that he had sufficient food and a housekeeper but that he "looked forward to a hard winter".<sup>(12)</sup>

Some parishioners recall that in later years, when he cooked for himself, he used to count the strands of spaghetti into the pot before cooking them, and was quite happy to go around in old worn out suits. He also seemed to be partial to the "moonshine" that was so prevalent after the Depression in these parts, and always carried a little flask in his hip pocket. After the closure of the Mill, the church and rectory were without electricity, so the Bishop loaned him money to purchase a generator. Later on, Bishop Gerow again loaned him \$250.00 to help him buy a new car (1934). Because he remained here as Pastor for so many years, his name appears on many reports to the diocese. He baptized many of our present day parishioners. Some of those diocesan reports are quite interesting in shedding some light on these times here in Kiln. In 1934, he reports how he had been attacked by a ruffian, and later how the rectory was robbed. In this year, his predecessor, Fr. Mortier, died, and his friend, Fr. Sorin, the pastor in DeLisle, was seriously ill, so he wrote and notified Fr. Sorin's relatives in France. In 1938 he recommended to the Bishop that the parish missions be divided as it was more work that he could handle. In 1939 he established a Perpetual Trust Fund with the diocese (small by today's standards) and instructed that the interest be used to pay insurance on the churches in the parish.<sup>(13)</sup> He seems to have been financially supported during most of his active ministry by his family in Belgium, and so was in a

position to establish this Trust Fund that still exists to this day. Reports of 1941 state that the Bishop here somehow found out that Fr. Denis was not in good health and made inquiries into this matter only to be told it was untrue. Fr. Denis was upset with these rumors and considered it a joke. However, in 1945 on April 2nd, Fr. Denis suffered a stroke that paralyzed him and two days later he was totally incapacitated. He was moved to the old Biloxi Hospital where he remained for the next eight years until his death in 1953. About the time that Fr. Denis took ill, the reports indicated that approximately \$2500.00 had been raised to build a new mission church in Catahoula, which was built and dedicated as "Our Lady of the Pines" in 1949. One of our presently retired priests of the diocese recently recalled to me how it was part of his assignment to bring communion on a regular basis to Fr. Denis during those years that he remained hospitalized up until his death in the old Biloxi Hospital. <sup>(17)</sup>

Immediately after Fr. Denis' departure from this parish, the Divine Word Missionaries, S.V.D., from St. Augustine Seminary in Bay St. Louis, attended to this parish. Shortly afterwards, the Trinitarians ( M.S.S.T.), in agreement with the Bishop, took over the administration of the parish (on a trial basis for 10 years). Fr. Francis Xavier Toner was the first Trinitarian priest to serve in this parish and again those (post) war years were not easy ones. Fr. Toner brought his mother to live with him and to "keep house". In 1949, the Bishop came to the Parish to dedicate the new church in Catahoula, and also in that year he confirmed 107 individuals from Kiln and its missions - probably the largest confirmation group in the history of the parish. Fr. Toner remained as pastor here about 8 years, and died only a few years ago (1991), while still active in ministry as Pastor of St. Joseph Parish, Pearlington, at the age of 83.

In the succeeding years, there was a long line of Trinitarian priests who served both as associates and pastors (See list of names at end of booklet). By 1954, a modern youth center was built where the present rectory now stands. This apparently was in response to the complaints that too many of the local youth spent far too much of their free time in the local hangout known as "The Cowshed" - that is now a vacant lot across the road from the D&K Store. The youth center (metal structure) built at a cost of \$20,520.00 boasted a wooden floor for skating, a boxing ring for the young men and changing rooms with shower facilities. Mr. Crump, a local businessman who had done well in the cotton warehousing business in New Orleans, was a major benefactor of this project, with Fr. Mallory also active in promoting these activities.

In the mid 60's, with Fr. Canisius Hayes as Pastor, a decision was made to build a new rectory (the present day one). The old wood frame structure was in a state of disrepair and was later sold, moved across the road to Sr. Mary

Ellen Road, where it still stands. It was decided to build the new rectory on the location of the Youth Center, so that metal structure was dismantled. In the meantime, the parish had purchased the old Kiln Consolidated School from the County School Board, as the county had recently built a new school structure in the Northern part of the county (Hancock North Central) to serve as both an Elementary and High School facility for most of the county. As a result, the school system no longer had use for the structure here by Annunciation, and so it was purchased by the parish in 1959. It was also planned to reopen this structure as a Catholic School, and so the metal Youth Center was to be moved and reconstructed at the western side of the school facility. However, after the concrete slab was laid and the structure was being erected, Hurricane Camille came, buckled the frame, and rendered it useless. The vacant concrete slab still stands there to this day. Fr. Canisius Hayes used his experience in designing the new rectory, and you will notice a distinct "Mexican Villa" style prevailing throughout the structure, as is also the case in the church of St. Ann (Lakeshore) that he later built. Fr. Hayes had spent some years of his ministry in the Southwestern part of the United States where this design is popular. Many people wonder why the structure is so large, especially now that it houses only one priest. At the time of its construction, however, it was envisioned there would be three or more priests in residence here, as was the case during the time when priests lived here while taking care of areas such as White Cypress, which at that time was not yet a parish in its own right and had no rectory of its own. It was built by the Trinitarian Order that served in such local parishes as St. Stephen in DeLisle, Our Lady of Lourdes in Pineville, St. Ann, St. John in Clermont Harbor and Lakeshore and St. Joseph in Pearlington. This rectory was built as a place for the local Trinitarian priests to meet and get together but this idea never really worked well in practice.

One of the later Trinitarian priests to serve this parish was Fr. Austin Walsh who was pastor here for eight years before taking an assignment with his order in Silver Spring, Maryland, and finally Fr. Antone Lynch who served as pastor for four years until 1988. He returned to the Trinitarian Seminary in Washington to teach the seminarians. With his departure, the Trinitarian Order returned this parish to the care of the Bishop of the diocese, who appointed Fr. Henry McNerney, a diocesan priest, as pastor here on June 1st, 1988. He is the first diocesan priest to serve here since 1945, and he still serves as the pastor at the present time.

## CHURCHES

In the preceding chapter I have dealt with the priests who served the spiritual needs of this area since 1847. In this chapter I will attempt to shed a little light on the churches of the area in that same period of time. One of the first churches in the county, Our Lady of the Gulf Church, constructed under Fr. Buteux, had to be demolished some years later, apparently because of structural defects. The succeeding church on that site was quite an imposing structure, but it, and most of the parish buildings, burned to the ground in 1906<sup>(14)</sup>, including the school and rectory. The present day O.L.G. church in Bay St. Louis was constructed in 1907.

In the records on this area, mention is made of a church being constructed on the banks of the Jourdan River, and was simply referred to as the Jourdan River Mission. It apparently was never formally named, and I have no records to indicate where exactly the structure existed. There are some ideas that it may have been originally in the Rotten Bayou area, behind the present day cemetery on the banks of the river. A church did exist in that location approximately one hundred years ago called St. Joseph, after which the cemetery is named, and for some reason, the succeeding church was located on the Kiln-DeLisle Road. To access the original church at Rotten Bayou, many people had to get to the church by boat, making the journey much shorter than traveling by land. The area close by where it existed on the river was known as "Church House Lake". The second church existed for some time on the Kiln-DeLisle Road but no records or photos of it seem to be available. It would have been approximately half way between Kapalama Road and Fenton Road. The Fenton road was chosen as the site of the third St. Joseph Chapel to better serve the community of that area, and it was constructed of cinder block, made on the site - unlike the two previous churches which were constructed of wood. It seems to have been built in the early 20's. The Labat family from Bay St. Louis got the contract for this structure and set up camp there, making the blocks in molds on that location, as much as was needed until completed. That structure served that community and early Diamondhead residents until early 1980's when it closed due to deteriorating conditions.

Meanwhile, back in Kiln or Jourdan River as then known, a newer church was constructed in 1869 and was given the name "Church of the Annunciation". However this structure soon, like its predecessor, proved to be too small for the growing congregation, and a larger structure was built and dedi-

cated almost on the same location in 1886. Some records indicate that the old church was then used as the first Catholic school (St. Mary's) in the area when Fr. Schmitt was the resident priest here. Similar records indicate an attendance of 11 boys and 17 girls, but this building was later demolished to make room for the sacristy of the newer church. The church of 1886 may well be the majority of the present day structure with the exception of the side wings that were added in 1985 to accommodate the growing congregation. The present pews in the side wings were salvaged from St. Joseph Church in Fenton which was closed in the same year. In that year, this church was completely redone inside and outside. It had previously been remodeled on the inside sometime in the early 60's, and some photos of that interior are to be found among many parishioners. Only one photo seems to exist to this day of how the sanctuary originally looked with the early high wooden altar. This photo can also be viewed at the Hancock Historical Society. It shows the original tongue-and groove wooden background by the altar, and the original altar rails that still exist to this day at a parishioner's house as the railings of the back porch. <sup>(15)</sup>

Some of the mission churches of this parish seem to have had a relatively short life span. No traces exist today where many of them once stood. However the mission of White Cypress, the Infant Jesus of Prague church still stands in a dilapidated state on Highway 603, having been abandoned as a church when the present-day St. Matthew the Apostle Church structure was completed (1981) some miles further north at Necaie Crossing. The old mission church has been occupied as a family dwelling for some time since its deconsecration as a church, as has St. Joseph's in Fenton.

No trace remains and very few photos exist of St. Louis King of France Chapel in Rocky Hill. It served the Rocky Hill community of Catholics for a number of years and, like all those mission churches, Mass was only celebrated there perhaps once or twice a month on a regular schedule as the priest made his rounds. This church was structurally damaged in Hurricane Camille in August, 1969, and subsequently had to be demolished. In the same way, Our Lady of the Pines Church in Catahoula, the last mission church of the parish to be built, had to be demolished and removed with the arrival of N.A.S.A. and its subsequent buffer zone. This caused a great displacement of homesteads in the 1960's to facilitate the testing of the rocket motors being used in the space program of the time. This buffer zone extends for approximately 7 miles in a radius around the test stands, and provides a sound shield or buffer from the very loud noises generated in the testing program. This move, in effect, wiped out the entire western half of the area that at one time comprised part of this parish.

In the same way, Holy Cross Church at Bayou LaCroix, which for many years had remained a mission of Annunciation, succumbed to the advances of the space program. However, a number of years prior to the advent of N.A.S.A., it had been entrusted to the care of the priests of Bay St. Louis (1928). This area is historically interesting as the cemetery still exists at that location deep in the buffer zone, and in that cemetery there exists a gravestone marking the burial place of many of the last Choctaw Indian tribe members. The church structure was removed from the property and reassembled as an addition to another little church called St. Henry's on Longfellow Road close to the Hancock County Fairgrounds, and behind the present K-Mart Store. The church functioned as a mission of St. Clare in Waveland to serve the community of that area north of Highway 90. It continued in active service with Masses being celebrated there twice weekly until it was destroyed by fire one Wednesday night in Lent in the early 1980's. In effect it was at the time two churches combined - St. Henry and Holy Cross.

The community at Bayou LaCroix was never very large at any time, and the remaining members of the Choctaw tribe, numbering about 50 persons, resided in that area, as listed in church reports to the diocese. (16) Records also indicate that a Mary Zengarling, whose grave can also be viewed at that cemetery, ran a school on that site for the Indian children at that time. Church bazaars held on the grounds in the early 1960's attracted a congregation of approximately 75 people, according to a priest who attended there as an associate from O.L.G. (17)

The parish of St. Clare in Waveland was established in 1912, and subsequently the missions of Clermont Harbor (St. Ann) and Lakeshore (St. John) were attached to St. Clare Parish until these areas later became an independent parish in later years. The mission church of Sacred Heart in Vidalia (Dedaux) was also attended from here by Fr. A.C. Denis, but it subsequently became a mission of St. Ann's Parish, Lizana, until it achieved the status of Parish in 1967 (having celebrated its 25th anniversary in 1992). In the Ansley community near Bayou Cadet, there still exists the structure of the old church of St. Ann, not having been used in quite a few years.

## ECONOMIC GROWTH

In the 1850's, numerous kilns were to be found in this area. These kilns produced large quantities of pine tar, with charcoal being a by-product from the fire under the kiln. Turpentine was another product of the area. This was apparently distilled in stills from the resin or sap of the many virgin yellow pine trees that were so plentiful all through this area. One such turpentine still, and a large one by all reports, operated on the banks of the river by Rotten Bayou, not far from the location of St. Joseph Church in Fenton. The river and its tributaries, including the bayous, seem to have silted up considerably since those days, as reports exist of many schooners travelling this route along the bayous to load their cargos for New Orleans. Captain Faye, a local resident of this area, apparently made this trip regularly in his masted schooner. There are also reports of how these schooners came up as far as the present-day bridge on the Kiln-DeLisle road, and used the turning basin there to begin their out-bound journey. The basin referred to would have been in close proximity to the present-day home of Mrs. Jessie Cuevas Kane, a 93-year-old resident who was born in the house she still lives in. The turpentine was used extensively as a basis for paint, while the pine tar was necessary for caulking the wooden hulls of ships of that time.

As time progressed, the harvesting of the virgin pine forest became the economic mainstay of this area, and with this came the advent of sawmills to produce lumber for construction and for export. France became the market, apparently, for much of this yellow pine. One of the earliest mills in the area was built by Sam Favre, who moved here from Mobile. His home, built sometime around 1859, was close to the banks of the river, not too distant from the present church. In 1950, this house (after the mill was gone) was moved to its present location and still stands as a fine example of building in that era. It is the house directly behind the church today. In all this time, little remodeling has been done to it - it still boasts of the high 10' ceilings of the time, as does the home of Mrs. Jessie Kane in Fenton. Soon after sawmills came to the area, particularly one owned by Mr. A. Guiterrez and Thompson, a more modern one was built by Mr. Francois Haas at Bayou Talla (the present home of his descendants) and later became known as the Herlihy-Haas mill. Mrs. Virginia Haas McLeod also operated a little store by the Jourdan River.

In the 1870's, Mr. Emilio Cue also built, and was operating, a very successful mill in this area, and went on to become the first Postmaster of this area. Because schooners travelled the waterways regularly, transporting the cured lumber, it became necessary to have facilities to service these boats, and

as a result two shipyards or repair facilities operated on the opposite bank of the river - one operated by Willie Curet and another at Bayou Talla owned by Jeremiah Haas. Another offshoot of all the lumber business became the operation of a shingle mill at an area on the bend of the river, just down river from the lumber yard. This area is still known to this day as Shingle Mill Lake, and some old wooden pilings can still be seen at its entrance when the water level is low. The owner and operator of this facility was one Salvadore Necaie. A turpentine store was also operated in this area by the McLeod family. Many of the names just mentioned are still to be observed today among the grave markers and vaults in the nearby Bayou Coco Cemetery. <sup>(18)</sup>

In the year 1909, the W.W. Carre Co. from New Orleans purchased the Herlihy-Haas Sawmill and ran a successful export business from there, during which time they built a railroad track to the northern end of the county to facilitate the flow of raw timber. Up to this time it was difficult and slow to transport the huge trees such distances. This mill operated successfully until 1912 when it was severely damaged by fire, after which it was sold to the Edward Hines Lumber Co. out of Chicago in 1913, a few years before the arrival of Fr. Denis as Pastor of Annunciation. Under the Hines Co. the mill was rebuilt as a more modern facility, and soon went on to become one of the largest sawmills in the South. These were the years when this area flourished economically and population-wise. With the growth and prosperity of the mill came demands for many other facilities to service the needs of the large work force employed in the mill. A remarkable panoramic photo of the mill, taken in the 1920's still exists in the rectory, and shows in great detail the expanse of the facility and the mountains of cut lumber. Little homes were built all along the river, along West River Road, and all along the present entrance to the church from the Kiln-DeLisle Road. These apparently were all painted the same shade of yellow (for the yellow pine tree) and are referred to in the property deeds as "yellow row houses". One other photo still to be seen today shows many of these little houses semi-submerged by the overflowing river waters. <sup>(19)</sup>

In these years (1912 - 1930) a new two-story school was built (wooden structure) at a cost of \$10,000.00, that offered many subjects not previously available. Some of our more senior parishioners still remember attending school there, and one member of the graduating class from there in 1919 was Jessie Cuevas, already referred to in previous pages. In addition to the new school of 1918, the area boasted of two drug stores, two doctor's offices, a 50-room white hotel, and a 40-room black hotel. The 50-room hotel stood almost directly across the street from the church where the Favre residence now stands,

while the second hotel was closer to the other end of the mill yard - near the present artesian well, but this hotel apparently burned prior to 1930. The Palace Theatre provided a place of entertainment for the workers and families in their free time.

Roads were built in those years to link this area with Picayune, Poplarville, and DeLisle, making 'the Kiln' the crossroads for activity. Railroads were also extended in this time to the northern part of the county, particularly to Lumberton, with "dummy lines" extending into other areas to receive more lumber. Dummy Line Road, in the Catahoula area, is still named after such a track.

Some reports suggest there may have been as many as 1000 homes in the area in those economically prosperous times. The Hines Lumber Co. also ran a company store that actually provided for all the material needs of the workers. Some very interesting photos of the area are still to be seen detailing the vastness of the business, the log pond in which lumber was soaked prior to sawing, and the train engines that accessed these parts on a regular basis. It is difficult for us to imagine, looking at the area today, that it flourished in such a way less than 70 years ago.

By 1930, it had become a very different story, and in very quick time. The days of glory were now gone forever. The Great Depression of 1929, together with the growing scarcity of good timber, brought about the demise of the great lumber yards. The mill closed and many were unemployed, forcing the area into poverty. With the departure of the mill, the electrical supply to the area and the church also ceased, forcing the pastor to borrow monies to purchase a generator to supply both the church and rectory with electricity. Fr. Denis, in one of his reports to the diocese, wrote a critical note concerning the Hines Company leaving the area after stripping it of all the valuable timber. Because these were depression days, most of the mill structure was salvaged for its timber or iron. The rail tracks were removed within two years and transported to Mobile Harbor from where they were exported to Japan to assist in their war effort (and may well have been used to make bombs for use in the war against the United States). Very few signs of the right-of-way of those tracks can be found today - a few places where it crossed over 'branches' or creeks perhaps. The area of the Kiln soon became a virtual ghost town.

Some reminders and evidence of the former activity of the Kiln still exist. In the years after the departure of the lumber mill, the entire area has become covered with new growth, but underneath the new growth some reminders can still be seen. The concrete base of the giant kiln still stands close to the river bank for all the world looking like an old gun fortress, standing about 10 feet

tall among the bushes. A few yards from there, one is likely to be startled by the sound of falling water - an amazing example of a free flowing artesian well, pouring out vast quantities of water 24 hours a day. Another lesser-sized well can at times be seen across the river but is often covered by high river waters. Both wells emerge through steel pipes that have never been capped. Once capped, these type wells are prone to silt up and become useless. A little to the west of the artesian well and kiln base, one comes across the little mountain of sawdust and pine bark - again a reminder of the activities of the time. This pile still stands some 8 - 10 feet deep and is in surprisingly fine condition despite the fact that it is at least 60 - 70 years old. Many of the local youth apparently use this convenient and safe target for rifle practice. From the vantage point of the sawdust pile, one can walk along and observe the log pond, that shallow area of water where the freshly felled trees were dumped from the trains to soak until they were sawed. Much of this area is also overgrown but from the vantage of an aerial photo, this area is clearly visible. Many of the old concrete buttresses that formed part of the mill structure are still to be seen scattered among the undergrowth.

## CEMETERIES

Perhaps some of the most historically revealing areas that can be visited today are many of the local cemeteries. These contain many records of the times in their own way and show the connection between various families that lived here at the time. The closest cemetery to Annunciation is one called Bayou Coco, about two miles to the east, where most of the recorded families are buried. Some fine monuments, with clearly legible writing, can be studied, while some are a little more difficult, due to weather erosion. The Haas, Herlihy, McLeod, Cue, Curet, Favre graves, and many others associated with the history of Kiln, are clearly visible.

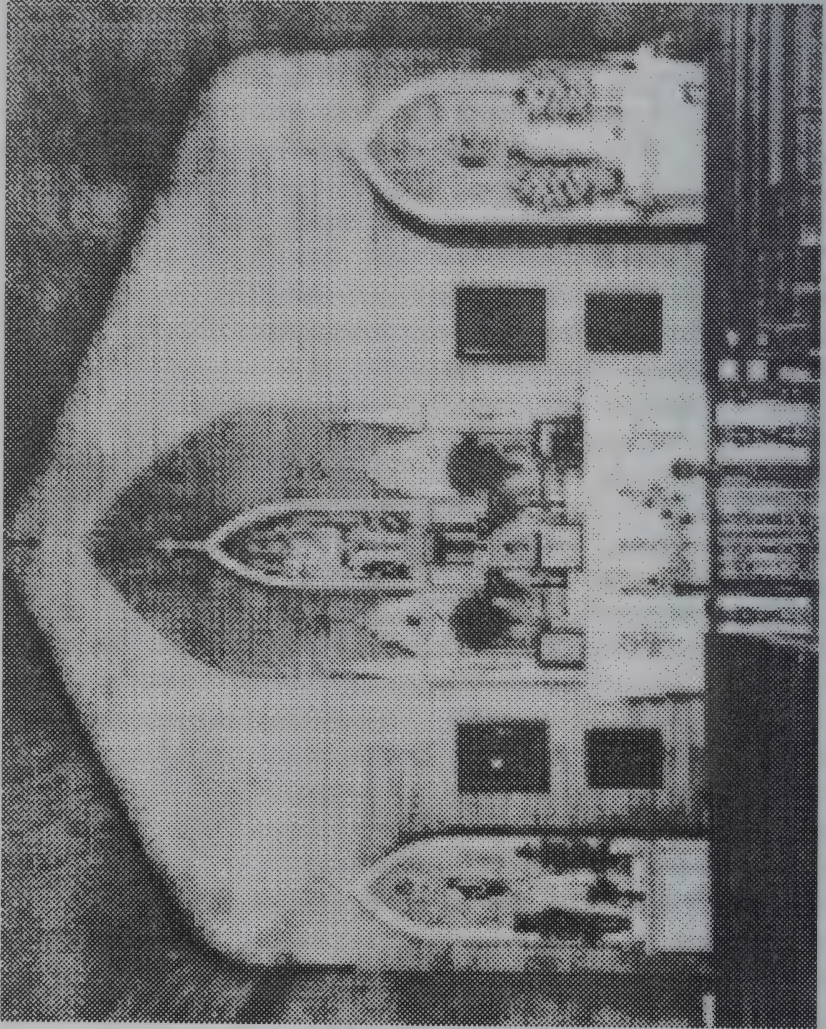
Perhaps an older historical record is the cemetery known as St. Joseph in Rotten Bayou - or its Indian name, Bayou Binanchoa (Benny-she-wah). The name apparently came from the fact that the Indians who occupied the area frequently killed the plentiful deer, primarily for their hides, while the carcasses were left to rot by the bayou. One of the earliest churches of the area (St. Joseph) was situated somewhere behind the cemetery, close to the river bluff which probably gave rise to the need for a cemetery. The most unique feature that first strikes visitors to this cemetery is the fact that virtually every grave and family plot is surrounded by a wire fence - causing some people to think that it must be a pet cemetery. It must be remembered that it was not until relatively recently that this county enacted a stock law putting the burden upon cattle owners to contain their animals. Prior to this law, all animals roamed freely in search of fodder with the result that they trampled on the graves. It seems there was quite a population of wild pigs in the area that found the fresh graves easy digging - so in order to prevent these problems, individuals constructed fences around each plot. Some of the graves appear to be very old in this cemetery and presently carry no markings - however, many older people can still tell where various people have been buried. Some graves, too, are remarkably well preserved and provide our histories with quite a bit of information. The original donor of the property is buried close to the flagpole in one of the oldest sections of the cemetery. The grave of Fr. A.C. Denis is simply marked with a granite cross and the years 1877 - 1953. This grave is to be found on the higher section of the cemetery to the left as one enters the property. The father of one of the other pastors of Annunciation is also buried close to the grave of Fr. Denis. <sup>(20)</sup> Some reports indicated that many of the

black people of that time are buried in an area now overgrown with pine trees and very few marked graves to the left of the entrance. One could easily spend a day in the cemetery with some local elderly people, going through all the history that lies there.

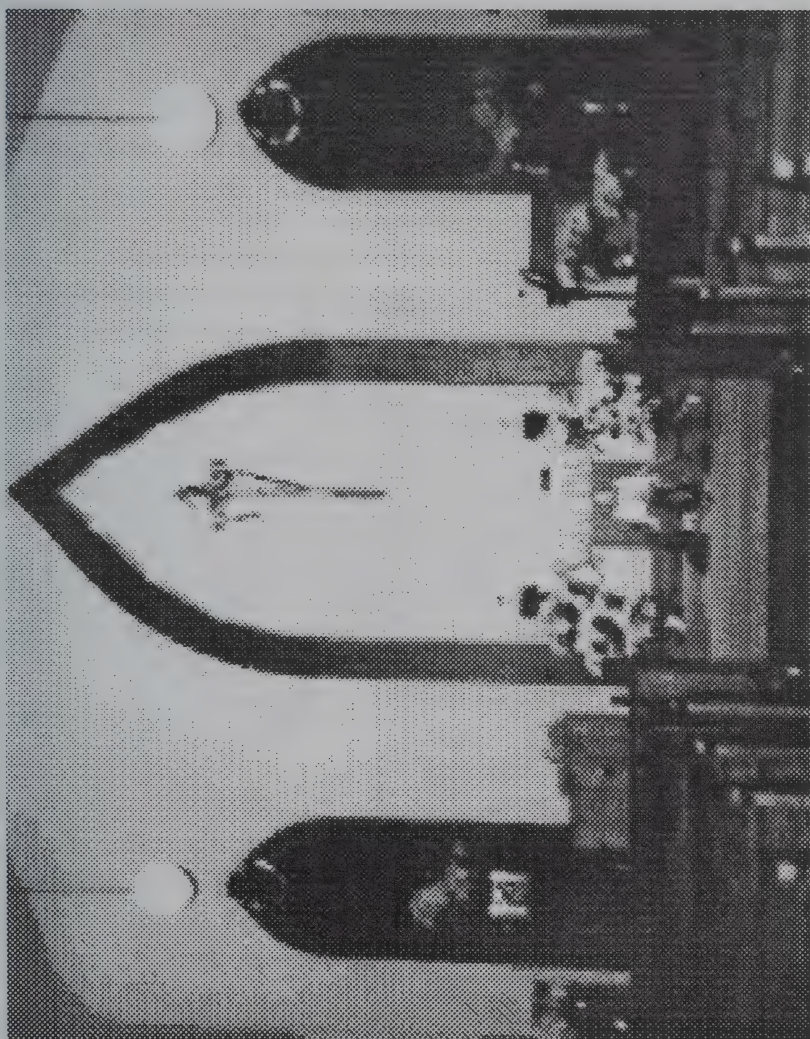
Of lesser interest are some smaller cemeteries in the area that many residents are unaware of. Some of these were family plots that expanded over the years. One such is known as the Thompson Cemetery to be found off the Texas Flat Road by the banks of the Jourdan River. However, for some reason, the name Thompson does not appear on any of the headstones, but names like Tate (a very old grave) and Holden appear a few times. The little cemetery at the location of Holy Cross Church in Bayou LaCroix is also of some interest, primarily because it contains a tombstone marking the burial place of many of the members of the Choctaw tribe. The grave of Mary Zengarling (1863-1933), the school teacher who ran a school there for the Indian children, is to be found close by, but few burials take place in these cemeteries any more. If one continues west on Texas Flat Road to its very end where it joins Highway 607, and travels south toward the N.A.S.A. facility, one encounters a remarkably large long rectangular cemetery completely surrounded by a sturdy concrete wall - known as Turtle Skin Cemetery. However, not many of the names recorded there have much connection to the Kiln area - except through some marriages; those names seem to predominate in the Picayune area today.

Also, within the present-day parish confines, one can find smaller individual family burial plots - usually in the family's own land, as the county had no restrictions in that regard until recently. The best known of these are the graves of Augustus and Therese Elmer, the original owners of Elmer's Candy Co. in New Orleans. Their marked graves are to be found a few hundred yards from the old homestead on Joe Moran Road. Therese Elmer died in March of 1993.<sup>(21)</sup> In the same way, the grave of Mr. Charles Cantrell (and his wife), an original partner of Pat O'Brien's famous pub in New Orleans, can be found (with owner's permission) on what was then his property known as Benny-She-Wah on the Kiln-DeLisle Road. The Brennans of New Orleans are the present day owners of that property. The graves of Mr. Jerry Page and his uncle are also to be found on the family property on Highway 43 - some miles west of Highway 603. Jerry was well known among antique automobile collectors for his work with, and collection of, vintage automobiles, especially his 1929 Packard and his favorite Model-T's.

Other cemeteries exist in the area, especially those known as Fenton Sandhill and Standard Sandhill, and perhaps others with which I have little familiarity - but no doubt these too offer glimpses of history of other times. One



Annunciation Altar Circa 1900



Annunciation Altar 1994

other little known cemetery is to be found right in the center of the Diamondhead community almost directly behind the Community Church. At present it displays evidence of eleven graves simply marked with little white wooden crosses, all unnamed except for the last interment that took place there in 1952 - that of Nicholas (Nicola) Mikovilje (Michael-Joe) and other graves largely belonging to that family. His descendants still reside on the banks of the Jourdan River just north of the I-10 bridge where the family has resided since arriving here from an island off Yugoslavia. They emigrated here in the early 1900's and set up a fishing camp on the river, after having first worked in the oyster business. That family is a member of this congregation.

## SCHOOLS

Some records exist of a Catholic school here at Annunciation in 1880 when Fr. Schmitt was pastor and acted as Principal. One record indicates attendance of 11 boys and 17 girls but the school was short-lived, as it occupied the old church structure soon demolished to accommodate the sacristy of the church built in 1886. Not much seems to be known of this little school.

One of the earliest public schools, located at Bayou Talla, served the educational needs of the children at that time. It appears to be a roughly built wooden two-story structure, and somewhat cramped - from the number of students that appear in one photo taken in front of the building. In 1914, after the passage of the Consolidated School Law, petitions were circulated in Kiln and Fenton for a new school district and a school to be established. These petitions were presented to the School Board, and in due time, they were acted upon favorably. As a result, a magnificent two-story structure was erected on the site of the present school structure. It was known as Kiln Consolidated School, and served an area of fifty-two square miles. Enrollment shortly afterward reached 350 pupils - 125 being transported by motor trucks and later by canvas-sided buses. The Principal was Prof. S.P. Powell, ably assisted by six instructors. Mr. W.A. Cuevas was President of the School Board, while Adolph Depreo (uncle of Elus Depreo, a parishioner) served as Secretary. <sup>(22)</sup> Fr. Chauvin was then pastor, and he wrote an article that can be found in a booklet issued to celebrate this historic milestone in the history of Kiln. This magnificent structure only served its purpose until the late 1930's or early 1940's when it was declared a fire hazard, and the present solid concrete and block school structure was constructed. These were known as the W.P.A. (Works Progress Administration) days and served as an effort to assist in creating some employment in the area. The present gymnasium structure was

apparently built with wheel-barrows of concrete with steel reinforcement. Because of its solid nature, it still serves as a hurricane shelter for Civil Defense in times of need - and indeed many of our parishioners still have memories of the night they spent there due to Hurricane Camille in 1969 (August). Many remember the words "Kiln Consolidated School" written in bold black letters on the parapet wall across the front of the building. These blocks conveniently served to contain the words "Annunciation School" in later years, with the first block of letters being painted over. This school offered agricultural studies, home economics, foreign languages, and science as part of the curriculum.

In the year 1959, the Public School System constructed a new school some miles north of here on Highway 603 to be known as Hancock North Central - a school to be remembered as the last school to combine elementary and high school students on one campus. With the demise of the old school in Kiln, this parish purchased it, together with the home economics building and the Principal's home, and opened it as Annunciation Elementary School in 1960. Much remodelling had to be done to make it suitable after its years of use. The old underground solid fuel furnaces were removed, and it was given a more modern gas-operated central heating system, and later A/C was added to most of the building. It continued to operate as a Catholic school until 1984 when declining enrollment and financial problems brought about its closure. It is still used by the parish for C.C.D. instruction, and many of the youth of the area get their regular basketball exercise in the gym.

In 1991, the School Board built its new state-of-the-art High School facility by Stennis Airport to accommodate the needs of all high school students of the county, excluding the Bay-Waveland area. Its student population today exceeds 1400, and is now at capacity due to the rapid growth of the county population; largely, it appears, as a result of legalized casino gambling that has now become a feature of life on the Coast for the past two years. This rapid increase in population growth of Hancock County is bringing about many changes to once quiet communities.

A school in the Dedeaux community also once served as a public school for the children of that area. In the same way, Sacred Heart Parish purchased that structure when it was no longer needed as a county school, but the parish never operated it as a Catholic school. While this school once served as a center for diocesan 'Search' youth retreats and such, it has become the central venue for the Cursillo movement of the diocese and is now commonly referred to as the 'Dedeaux Hilton'.

## SISTERS

To operate a Catholic school at Annunciation in 1960, it was necessary to find teachers, and in those days the logical choice was to request some teaching order of Sisters to assume this responsibility. Since the Trinitarian Order of priests had been taking care of this parish for many years at that time, it was only logical that the corresponding order of Sisters would join this parish in this new venture. Sisters of that order had already been associated with this parish, not in a teaching capacity, but in working with the needy people of the community. The main thrust of the Trinitarian Order (M.S.S.T.) is to establish and develop the Catholic faith in rural communities, and this parish fitted that description perfectly.

Many Sisters of that order have spent years of service in this parish in varying capacities. Originally they resided in an old house not far from the site of the old rectory in front of the church. This house, of itself, seems to have had quite a history. It originally belonged to one John Ulyses, who leased a piece of property from the parish for his residence, and he and his wife operated a small store across the road (at the present bend in the road). However, due to some misunderstanding or oversight, the taxes were not paid on this property. Eventually some settlement was arrived at, and the parish again took control of the property and the house. The only visible trace of that habitation today is a concrete pipe sunk into the ground where the well once was. This house then served as the Sisters' residence until the present brick structure was later built exclusively as a convent for these Sisters. The old convent house was simply torn down for any worthwhile lumber it contained.

The most well-known name among all the Sisters who served here seems to be that of Sr. Mary Ellen (Henebury) who faithfully served as a nurse to the ill of the area despite the fact that she never learned to drive an automobile, but in later years used a golf cart as her means of conveyance. Her loving service extended over a period of twenty years before she eventually returned to the Mother House in Pennsylvania, where she died just a few years ago at the age of 92. Other names that are still remembered for their service are Sr. Joan Lorraine, Sr. John, Sr. Frances Katherine, Sr. Clare Frances, Sr. Margaret Guinan, Sr. Lorraine Blanchette, Sr. Josepha, and others. Some of these served as Principal of the school during its years of operation while others taught in the classrooms, and are still remembered by their students today.

Some Sisters from the order of the Religious of Jesus and Mary (R.J.M.)

from New York also served in the school and parish in the late 70's and early 80's. Also Sr. Mary Daniel (a Dominican from New Orleans) and finally Sr. Julia Marie Burke (Sister of Mercy) from St. Louis served in the religious education in the parish up until 1993. The names of all sisters who at one time served in the parish are to be found at the end of this booklet.

## DIAMONDHEAD

The residents of the Diamondhead area now constitute a large percentage of the congregation at each of our three weekend Masses and also the daily morning Mass. The growth of the community is relatively new to this parish, and many of our congregation remember when no such place existed. In those days, and prior to the construction of the Interstate, that area was referred to as Hickory Point - being largely inaccessible except for the road going as far as St. Joseph Cemetery and after that it was only tracks across the woods. Only three families seem to have inhabited most of that area in the late 1950's - much of it being used for grazing cattle. The Moran family was one of the three occupying the area - where the old nursery now stands.

Not far from the site of the present marina, also on the shores of Bay St. Louis, there was built a luxury hotel known as Pine Hills. This was a sister hotel to the Buena Vista in Biloxi, and both boasted of very fine amenities in those days (1940's) including some fine marble fireplaces and tiled floors. This hotel apparently was built with the expectation that the Highway 90 bridge from Pass Christian would terminate at that point, however, that was not to be the case. It crossed the narrowest point of the Bay and currently joins Pass Christian to the eastern point of the town of Bay St. Louis. Consequently this hotel never flourished as intended. It was later bought by the Oblate Missionary Order of priests and run as a place for novices or seminarians for a number of years. At this time it also featured its own private beach and golf course. However, its operation as a seminary lasted only about 15 years. Afterwards it was owned by a hotel chain, but never again operated as such, and in its latter years it lay derelict, overgrown and ransacked of its fine fittings. Finally it was owned by its newest neighbor, the Dupont Chemical Company, which eventually demolished the impressive-looking four-story structure. Its sister hotel, the Buena Vista, also fell prey to the wreckers' ball about a year ago to make room for the expansion of the new Casino business on the Coast. The Buena Vista served as the venue for the annual Catholic

Youth Convention for many years prior to its closure in the 1980's.

The growth of the Diamondhead community was slow at first, with sales offices attracting retirees as buyers from New Orleans and Chicago areas in the late 1960's and early 70's. The community offers many recreational facilities, such as two golf courses, tennis courts, swimming pools, hotel, and fitness center. The area also consists of its own shopping center, airport, marina facilities, elementary academy, post office, and a new nursing home.

In the past two years, the growth of this area has almost been explosive, now attracting many younger families with children as well as many retirees. At present the population numbers somewhere around 4000 people, and the population growth and new home starts have been the greatest of any county in the state for the previous two years. The entire area is platted for approximately 7500 households if fully occupied. At present, no Catholic church structure exists in the area, but Masses are said in the hotel during the Lenten season. A Community Church, Baptist Church, and Episcopal Church also serve the community. St. William Mission Church is located only a few miles from the back entrance, off the Kiln-Delisle Road. The existence of a new Catholic Church in the area is a distinct possibility as the area and the Catholic population continue to grow, and this little Annunciation Church once again exceeds its capacity. The eastern boundary of Diamondhead coincides with the Hancock/Harrison lines and also the line that marks the eastern extremity of this parish.

## N.A.S.A.

The western demarcation line of this parish extended all the way west to the Pearl River at one time. The progress of the U.S. Space Program in the late 1960's changed that considerably. With the decision to construct the N.A.S.A. space center and testing facility with all of its associated offices in Hancock County, a major change occurred in this area. With the testing of the huge engines needed for the space program, a need was also seen for a substantial buffer zone (approximately a 7-mile radius) to protect homes and residents from the noise and vibration involved during the testing process. Three huge test stands were constructed to test the newer generation liquid hydrogen-powered engines to be used in the space shuttle. These engines could be tested separately or in different combinations.

In order to provide for this buffer zone, it became necessary for the government to purchase or lease this vast area - amounting to almost 1/3 of the entire size of the county (the county covers an area of 485 square miles or 310,400

acres). With the erection of this zone came the relocation of all the inhabitants of the area, and either the demolition or relocation of the homes. No habitable structures or overnight occupancy is permitted within this area, however, cattle grazing, farming, and hunting is allowed in these lands. The practical result of this was that, in effect, many little communities were relocated and the entire population of the western half of this parish no longer resided in that area. The eastern perimeter of this zone extends almost to Highway 603 - or to just west of Stennis Airport, and to the south of Highway 43. The N.A.S.A. test facility is now called the John C. Stennis Space Center in honor of Mississippi's best-known Senator of recent times.

The testing of the liquid hydrogen-powered shuttle engines still continues on a regular basis, and newcomers to the area are alarmed when this is experienced for the first time, until someone explains the reason for the deep rumble and the associated vibration. It has been said that some members of the congregation had thought it to be a mild earthquake when this happens while in church. Windows and chandeliers rattle while the test-firing continues, but soon one becomes used to the experience and knows that it is only shortlived. Many other government facilities share this area, such as Naval Research and Development offices and, until recently, the army operated a plant to manufacture its 155 mm tank shells. Recently it was proposed to expand the operations there to include testing of the new generation of advanced solid rocket motors, also used in the space shuttle launches, known as A.S.R.M.'s. However, to date this has not come to pass. These rocket engines are to be manufactured in Iuka, Ms. All engines tested and certified here are then shipped by barge on the Intercoastal Canal system from here to Cape Kennedy.

## FACT AND FICTION

One cannot write of this area's history without some mention of one of the more colorful aspects of life that prevailed here for some years. It is well known to many people that this area of Hancock County has long had a reputation as the 'Moonshine Capital of the World', and from many of the stories of older residents of the area, it seems it may very well be true. With the proliferation of kilns for distilling turpentine and for curing lumber, it probably seemed fairly logical to experiment with distilling alcohol. In the days of prohibition, it made this option all the more lucrative. However it seems that it was not until after the depression and the loss of the lumber and sawmill business here that, for many people, it was probably done out of necessity as much as anything. It has been told to me, by one who knows, that at the height of its popularity, there were probably up to 50 stills operating in these parts. Recently I met a retired Diamondhead resident who recalled growing up in Chicago, and remembers as a child being in the storeroom of one of the 'speakeasies' there and seeing many bottles bearing the words 'Kiln, Mississippi' on them. At that time, he said this meant nothing to him, and he never realized that one day he would retire to that place. It seemed to have a reputation for fine whiskey.

Stories abound of stills being set up in the woods, preferably near a source of good water, and of course it was a constant battle with the 'revenuers' who came in and destroyed any stills they found. Some stills apparently were made of high quality material, such as copper, but also it is said that some 'white lightning' was distilled using lesser quality materials, even automobile radiators and lead pipe that could prove to be a deadly combination. It was a corn whiskey requiring much sugar to assist in the fermentation process of the mash, and once distilled, the used mash was often dumped into the woods where the wild hogs would find it, eat it, and then carry on like drunken creatures which, of course, they were, or simply lay around in a drunken stupor after their meal.

Much of the end product apparently found its way to the pubs of Chicago while some was sold and consumed locally. It was generally sold in gallon jugs and was quite reasonably priced (\$1.50) in later years compared to what could be purchased legally. Nowadays, however, they say it is almost as cheap to buy commercial whiskey as to make one's own. Some of this moon-

shine probably suffered in quality as it was not allowed to age and mature in oak casks to allow it to mellow in flavor. It has been reported that some of this whiskey straight from the still, especially the 'first run', could be as high as 140 proof. With the legalization of whiskey distilleries in other states, it lessened the demand for local moonshine, and nowadays it is rare to come across examples of it. Any produced today may be more for 'old times sake' than for any economic reason.

The rivers of this area probably contain some history from earlier times. As stated earlier, this area was generally referred to by Catholic missionaries as the 'Three Rivers Mission', referring to the Pearl River to the west, the Jourdan River right here, and the Wolf River to the east. The Pearl River, as most know, extends all the way from the Gulf to north of Jackson. The name seems to have been derived from accounts that the earliest French explorers apparently found pearls along the mouth of the river, dumped there by the Indians who were only interested in the flesh of the oyster. Some reports suggest that these oysters with the pearls had been washed up there from the Caribbean waters. For whatever reason, it still bears the Pearl name.

The Wolf River and the settlement known as Wolftown (now DeLisle) also carries a story as to the origins of those names. Timber wolves apparently were plentiful in the days of the early settlers, and became somewhat of a problem for many people travelling through the area on foot. It seems it was not unusual for a wolf to cause a man to have to climb a tree in order to be safe - where he would have to remain the entire night to guarantee his own safety. In response to this problem, people began digging wolf pits - in essence, large holes in the ground, where some meat or bait was placed, and then perhaps covered over - to form a trap for an unsuspecting wolf. Many such pits, it seems, existed further up along the river, giving rise to the name for the river and the community that grew further downstream.

The local river is often referred to as the Jordan, but its proper name spelling of Jourdan after a Frenchman, Noel Jourdan, who lived in the Hickory Point area of Rotten Bayou. This person gained some fame in belonging to the First Mississippi Constitutional Committee in the Legislature. This river, according to the memories of the older residents, played a vital role in the unfolding history of the county. The lumber and sawmill businesses depended heavily on these waters for their transportation needs. Later it seems it became a waterway for Al Capone and his gang as they ran their ex-Coast Guard cutter up the waters, bringing illegal whiskey and rum from Cuba. This was

(allegedly) unloaded up river from the location near the present-day Interstate and then shipped overland to (you guessed it) Chicago.

One of the inlets on this river is referred to as Shingle Mill Lake - referring to the location of such a single mill during the lumber boom. Further upstream on Rotten Bayou is a lake known as 'Moonshine Lake' for reasons you can only imagine- and still further upstream one encounters 'Church House Lake' - close to the cemetery where the original St. Joseph Church once stood.

Other stories recall how two men were 'fishing' (illegally) not far from there, using dynamite for bait - when apparently a stick of dynamite exploded before being disposed of, causing the death of both fishermen. The body of one was never found. A similar story tells of the death of seven individuals (again in the Rotten Bayou area) close to present-day Bayou View Road in Diamondhead, when their boat capsized on a turn in the river - apparently all occupants were drowned and are buried close to the site of the accident in unmarked graves in the wooded area across the Bayou. These stories are almost impossible to verify, but continue to live in the memories of our older residents.

I recently met a man in Hancock Hospital, aged 84, from the Clermont Harbor area of the county, who stated that he only remembers one Indian in the area during his childhood. He said they referred to him simply as "Griswell". He lived alone on a nearby bayou, smoked his pipe and patted the children on the head. Mr. Garcia did not know if he had a last name or whatever became of him. <sup>(11)</sup>

In the older cemetery of Bayou Cadet, there also exists the marked grave of one Cadet LaFontaine, after whom Bayou Cadet is called. Nowadays it is usually referred to as Bayou Caddy - the site of the second dockside casino in Hancock County.

Perhaps our oldest living parishioner at this time is Hilda Curet Cretors, now bed-ridden and in her 95th year. Her older brother, George, survived to within 5 months of his 100th birthday, and another brother, Camille, died only a few years ago, at the age of 97.

Another couple setting new records is Bernice Koenenn and Leo Garriga, who were married in this church late one evening by Fr. A. C. Denis, with the oil lamps of the time to illuminate the church on July 29, 1933. They celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in this church in 1983 and their 60th anniversary in 1993 - and this year they will celebrate their 61st year of married life together. They are very active parishioners, and few couples can say they have celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary in the same church in which they were married.

I have researched to some extent the involvement of people from this

area in the Civil War activities and come up with precious little. However, only in recent weeks I have been told of the existence of an old Civil War battlefield in the 'upper Gainesville' area of Hancock County. That area is now part of the N.A.S.A. test facility and is not generally open to the public. Most of it is in an overgrown state and offers no traces of its history, although it has been told to me that some people in the past claimed to have found musket balls and some cannon balls in that vicinity. Also, only in the past few weeks, I have been told that there are some Civil War era graves to be seen near Pearlinton, behind the Oak Harbor subdivision, where about twenty two Civil War soldiers were buried. A Favre family cemetery in Bay St. Louis is also said to contain two marked graves of Civil War veterans and one is supposed to exist right here in the Bayou Coco Cemetery. Other than that, little has come to my attention of Civil War interest in this part of the county.

As already mentioned, this booklet contains some historical information—some perhaps of dubious historical value, some folklore and stories of elderly parishioners. Many of our parishioners have much more to add and hopefully somebody, someday will gather this interesting information but for now I will conclude with what I have already gathered. The past is now behind us, and as we live in the present, we look forward with some anticipation to what the future may bring to this parish and this area of Hancock County. Only a few years ago, few people would have envisioned the Casino industry as it has sprung up along the Coast and especially that Bay St. Louis would host the first dockside Casino facility on the Coast—now joined by a second at Bayou Caddy, an area that few people ever visited unless they got lost and kept driving to the end of the Beach Road. The building of a new County High School close to Stennis airport has also added to the activity of this area and now with the four lane highway being built on Highway 603 to access the airport, we can expect to see a dramatic growth in vehicular traffic—much of which will have a economic impact on Kiln.

Life is a series of changes and so we pray that God will continue to guide us through the changing times that await us as we continue to grow and worship together.

## REFERENCES

1. Hancock County Chamber of Commerce Publication.
2. "The Catholic Church in Mississippi 1837-65" Fr. J. Pillar, P. 86
3. IBID. P. 86
4. "Catholicity in Mississippi", P. 154 Bishop Gerow
5. IBID., P. 155
6. "The Catholic Church in Mississippi", P. 89, Fr. J. Pillar
7. "Catholicity in Mississippi", P. 155, Bishop Gerow
8. IBID., P. 156
9. IBID., P. 156
10. IBID., P. 157
11. Gordon Garcia, Age 84 from Clermont Harbor.
12. 1931 Report to Bishop—Diocesan Archives, Biloxi.
13. 939 Report to Bishop—Diocesan Archives, Biloxi.
14. Photo can be seen at Hancock County Historical Society building on Cue Street in Bay St. Louis.
15. Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Knight's house off Highway 43-1/2 way to Picayune.
16. Report to Bishop, Diocesan Archives—Biloxi.
17. Msgr. James J. Hannon, retired in Ocean Springs.
18. Local cemetery off Kiln-Delisle Road-2 miles from Church.
19. Hancock County Historical Society, Bay St. Louis.
20. Mr. Hissey— father of Fr. Pierre Hissey.
21. Therese Elmer died (3-11-93) and is buried close to her husband on the family property, Old Joe Moran Road.
22. Booklet "Kiln Consolidated High School, 1918-19."

## SOURCES

"The Catholic Church in Mississippi 1837-65". Vol. I by Fr. J. Pillar S.M. Volume II is still being worked on. A copy of Volume I can be seen in the Diocesan archives in Biloxi. It contains quite a detailed and interesting history of the early days of Catholicism in this state.

"Catholicity in Mississippi" by Bishop Gerow. This is a fairly substantial work compiled by the late Bishop Gerow. It consists mainly of articles from every parish in the state as submitted by the pastors of that time. A copy of the work is also available at the Diocesan archives.

"Report to the Bishops" is an index volume covering a brief account of annual reports, etc., made by Pastors of the Diocese and various diocesan communications with various pastors and individuals. The copy in the Biloxi archives is only on index-original documents may be in the archives in the Jackson diocese. It covers many volumes in alphabetical order.

Hancock County Historical Society, Cue Street, Bay St. Louis, has many interesting photos from the early days of Kiln-lumber years up to 1930's.

"Kiln Consolidated High School, 1918-19" is a booklet of about 20 pages, printed for the occasion of the building of the new school in Kiln in that year. A few copies are still to be found among parishioners.

Msgr. James J. Hannon, now retired in Ocean Springs, served in O.L.G., Bay St. Louis, for many years, up to the 60's, and took care of the Church of Holy Cross at Bayou LaCroix, where they held church bazaars with a congregation of approximately 75 people.

Other sources include various local elderly parishioners-Ray Favre, Leo Garriga, Hilda Curet, Elus Depreo, and others, who remember stories from their youth as recalled by their parents and elders.

## POPES DURING THE HISTORY OF ANNUNCIATION PARISH

No. 255	Pius IX	1846-1878
No. 256	Leo XIII	1878-903
No. 257	(St.) Pius X	1903-1914
No. 258	Benedict XV	1914-1922
No. 259	Pius XI	1922-939
No. 260	Pius XII	1939-958
No. 261	John XXIII	1958-963
No. 262	Paul VI	1963-1978
No. 263	John Paul I	1978 (33 days)
No. 264	John Paul II	1978 (now reigning)

## BISHOPS OF NATCHEZ, JACKSON, AND BILOXI

	Years of Service	Date of Death
John J. Chance, S.S. First Bishop	1841-1852	7-22-1852
J. O. Van deVelde, S.J.	1853-1855	11-13- 1955
William Henry Elder (to Cincinnati)	1857-1880 1880-1904	10-31-1904
Francis Janssens	1881-1888	1897 (to New Orleans)
Thomas Heslin	1889-1911	2-22-1911
John Edward Gunn, S.M.	1911-1924	2-19-1924
Richard Oliver Gerow	1924-1967	12-20-1976
Joseph B. Brunini	1967-1984	Retired
Joseph Lawson Howze First Bishop of Biloxi diocese - diocese created June 6, 1977	1977-	Present Bishop

## PRIEST'S NAMES FOUND IN OUR CHURCH RECORDS

Signature	First Appears	Date of Death
Fr. Stanislaus Louis Buteux	1847	6-14-1875
Fr. Henry LeDuc	1866	8-27-1897
H.A. DeMorangies	1873	Unknown
T.H. Meerschaert	1873-1879	Unknown
A. Oberti		9-10-1878
M.F. Grignon	1873	4-17-1887
M. Chisolfi	1875	9-22-1875
Dutto Slogreid	1875	Unknown
G.O. Marette	1875	Unknown
E.H. Hahn	1879	Unknown
Bishop W.H. Elder	1879	10-31-1904
Aloise Van Waesberghe	1880-1890	4-06-1906
Bishop Janssens	1886	6-10-1897
Fr. A. Ketels	1888	7-11-1921
Fr. F.X. Guay	1889	Unknown
H. Mortier	1890-1896	10-18-1933
E. M. Schmitt	1894-1897	Unknown
Rene J. Sorin	1898-1900	2-6-1955
Persus DeGruyter	1899-1903	Unknown
J.B. Frankhauser	1907	Unknown
E. Husser	1910	Unknown
P.J. Ahern	1911	Unknown
A. Vautier	1917	Unknown
J. H. Chauvin	1903-1919	8-13-59
D. J. Foulkes	1927	Unknown
A. C. Denis	1919-1945	12-17-53
F.X. Toner, M.S.S.T.	1946	5-31-91
Hubert Wolf	1947	
Edmund Kollar	1948	
Fr. H.P. Harris, C.M.	1949	
Fidelis Becker, M.S.S.T.	1949	
Benigno Presa, C.M.	1950	
Charles Tague, M.S.S.T.	1951	
Ernest Hill, M.S.S.T.	1952	

DePaul Landrigan,M.S.S.T.	1952
Turibius C. Mulchay,M.S.S.T.	1954
Paul Keenen	1954
Bernard McDonald	1954
Adrian Doherty,M.S.S.T.	1955
Conrad Schmitt	1955
Mark Reitzen	1955
Celestine Pfannenstiel	1956
James Rohr	1957
Antonio Hernandez	1957
Coleman Nolan	1958
David O'Connor	1958
John Robinson	1958
Edward Murphy	1958
Vernon Danenmann	1958
Thomas Koegan	1961
Mallory Dugan	1962
Kenneth Brown	1963-64
Thomas Hayes	1965
Abram Dono,M.S.S.T.	1965
Canisius Hayes	1965
Emil Keil	1966
Pierre Hissey	1967
Maurice Flood	1967
Gerald Swift	1971
Julian Legere	1971
Victor Seidel	1972
Bertin Glennon	1973
David Hamm	1975
James Devaney	1975
Austin Walsh,M.S.S.T.	1977-84
Peter Blanchard,Marist	1977
Thomas K. Stepanski,S.T.	1980
Maurice Haiss	1980
Joseph P. Keenan	1984
Antone J. Lynch	1984-88
Henry McInerney	1988-Present Pastor

## **SISTERS WHO SERVED THIS PARISH**

1. Sr. Mary Ellen Henebury, M S. B. T. (deceased)
2. Sr. Joan Lorraine, M.S.B.T. (second principal)
3. Sr. Laura, R.J.M.
4. Sr. Mary, M.S.B.T.
5. Sr. Joan Christopher, M.S.B.T.
6. Sr. Frances Katherine, M.S.B.T.
7. Sr. Mary Adele (deceased)
8. Sr. Barbara Ann
9. Sr. Clare Frances (1st school principal)
10. Sr. Rose Marion (3rd school principal)
11. Sr. Laura Dulude, R.J.M.
12. Sr. Margaret Therese Guinan, R.J.M. (principal)
13. Sr. Lorraine Blanchette, R.J.M. (principal)
14. Sr. Antoinette Gamache, R.J.M.
15. Sr. Sonata Marie, M.S.B.T.
16. Sr. Rita
17. Sr. Paul Anthony, M.S.B.T.
18. Sr. Cera Anthony, M.S.B.T.
19. Sr. Josepha McNutt, M.S.B.T.
20. Sr. Mary Richards (White Cypress)
21. Sr. Mary Daniel, O.P.
22. Sr. Julia Marie Burke, ( Mercy ).

## **BROTHERS WHO SERVED HERE**

Regis Brennan, S.T.  
Joseph Dudek, S.T.  
Senan Gallage, S.T.  
Antone J. Lynch, S.T.

## **DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

Mrs. Robbie Merrifield  
Sister Julia Marie Burke  
Mrs. Jan Smith

## HISTORICAL SUMMARY (NOTES)

- 1885 Annual report to Bishop by Fr. Waesberghe-lists population of Kiln at 225.
- 1886 New Church to be built-old one too small. Annual report states it is to be built by Fr. DeMorangies.
- 1894 Report lists 383 white and 8 colored  
School mentioned as "St. Marys" Population 11 boys, 17 girls
- 1897 Fr. Schmitt unable, because of frequent illness, to attend the missions in Kiln- left diocese.
- 1898 Annual report—Catholic population 310
- |               |          |           |         |
|---------------|----------|-----------|---------|
| Bayou LaCroix | 95 White | 50 Indian | 0 Negro |
| Bayou Cadet   | 293 "    | 0         | 0       |
| Pearlington   | 134 "    | 0         | 0       |
| Logtown       | 64 "     | 0         | 4       |
- 1903 Fr. Chauvin changed from assistant at O.L.G. to administrator of Jourdan River and missions.
- 1915 Talk of purchase of Fenton property, new lot, more central.  
December-John Ulysses asks about report to sell property  
(where his house was) - denied by Bishop Gunn. Taxes were unpaid on the leased property.
- 1927 Fr. A.C. Denis reports: White Cypress Church(Infant Jesus of Prague) almost finished. Loan of \$500.00 from Bishop until Extension Society grant arrives.
- 1930 Mill closes - not to re-open. Many out of work. Church now has no electric lights. Fr. Denis has to install own generator (for church and rectory). Buys house across street for housekeeper.
- 1931 Fr. Denis writes that he has nothing to complain of -"has enough to eat and has a cook" but "looks forward to hard times during the winter".

- 1934 Fr. Denis - attacked by a ruffian. Fr. Mortier dies. Bishop loans Fr. Denis \$250.00 to help buy a new car. Fr. Sorin (of Delisle) ill—relatives in France notified. Asks Bishop for prayers for “the poorest people in your diocese”.
- 1938 Fr. Denis recommends parish missions be divided.
- 1939 Fr. Denis establishes Trust Fund, interest to be used for insurance (on churches).
- 1941 New roof on Church. Looking for sisters to work here. Rumor his health not good- upset when Bishop inquires—considers it a joke.
- 1945 Fr. Denis suffers stroke—April 22nd. paralysis. April 24th-hospitalized. S.V.D. priest assists here til Fr. Toner, M.S.S.T., took over as administrator. \$2500.00 collected for new church in Catahoula.
- 1949 Settlement of Ulysses property by church—quit claim deed given to parish. Confirmation class for Kiln and missions numbered 107—largest ever. Our Lady of the Pines (Catahoula) dedicated by Bishop.
- 1954 Youth Center constructed (cost \$20,520.00.) Mr. Crump, benefactor.

## ADDITIONAL NOTES

Bayou LaCroix (Holy Cross Church) had Indian school—lists 23 Indian children. 1896. T Teacher: Mary Zengarling. Population of Bayou La Croix—1898—95-white—50-Indians.

A note from a report of 1903 states: “The first days of December(1902) the last Indian families have left my missions, so there are no more Indians now here around”. (Given to Fr. Gmelch at O.L.G. in 1927.)

# Thanks

My thanks to the many people who assisted me in so many ways in this project, and also in the compiling of the video narrative. Gathering information of this sort involves talking to many people and requesting old photographs. My thanks to all who contributed to this project, particularly our parish secretary, Margaret Kingsbery, for deciphering all of my handwriting and for hours of patient endurance in this task. Thanks, too, to Lola for researching many dates; to Clare Trahan for proof reading so many pages; to Anna DeMarco, Laura Haas, Kay Cerisier, and Marc Cerisier for their expertise in word processing and formatting the entire thing on the computer. Thanks also to Clem Acker for narrating the video script, Jim Jelinski and Gloria Burlette for providing their Cessna 172's for the aerial photography.

Many sources, including many photos and facts, were supplied (for the video) by many parishioners. I thank Joan Howard, Birdie Mae Ladner, Larry Ladner, Eric Larsen, Elus and Estelle Depreo, Leo Garriga, Hancock County Historical Society, William Carey College (Genealogical Library), Trinitarian archives, Silver Spring, Md., diocesan archives in Biloxi and Jackson, and especially Yvonne Ladner for providing a diocesan publication from 1937 commemorating the Centennial of the establishment of the Diocese of Natchez. My thanks too to anyone else who supplied any information contained in this booklet.

May the road rise to meet you.

May the wind be always at your back.

May the sun shine warmly on your face;

The rains fall softly upon your fields

And, until we meet again,

May God hold you in the palm of His Hand.

(Old Irish Blessing)



